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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR G/IWI KHADIAGALA AND NEA/ARPI BERNIS

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT: CHILD MARRIAGE

REF: STATE 36341

1. Article 26 of the Kuwaiti personal status law stipulates that the minimum age for GOK authentication of a marriage between two Kuwaiti citizens is 15 years for a woman and 17 years for a man. The woman, regardless of age, requires the consent of a male guardian -- father, eldest brother, uncle, etc. -- to wed for the first time. For non-citizens, who represent approximately 65% of residents in Kuwait, the woman's minimum age depends on the marriage law of her country of citizenship. Likewise, the man's national law will determine his minimum age.

2. A mid-level Ministry of Justice official estimated the incidence of underage marriage ranges from 2-3% of total marriages in Kuwait. He said the practice occurs primarily in rural desert areas among the Bedouin community. Many are ignorant of marriage law, which may result in unintentional underage unions. In other instances, the official commented, rural residents claim ignorance but proceed with marriage regardless. The GOK attempts to educate the rural community via the Ministry of Religious Endowment and Islam Affairs and through imams in local mosques.

3. There are no U.S.-funded initiatives addressing underage marriage underway in Kuwait. Potential public awareness programs that target the rural population could be helpful in reducing the incidence of child marriage although the problem does not appear significant in Kuwait.

LEBARON